

Park Central Square-The Lawrence Halprin Associates design.¹

Lawrence Halprin & Associates' (LHA) involvement in the ongoing evolution of what is now called Park Central Square apparently began in 1965 with a letter to LHA from Louis Reps, a former Springfield resident who had "assisted other cities in downtown restoration and" had "been interested from the beginning in the long-pending home town project."² Mr. Reps requested a glossy print of one of LHA's prior works, Oakbrook Shopping Center in Illinois, to use in a Missouri newspaper article to "call attention to the need for a pedestrian mall on the huge public square in Springfield and the four approach streets, as recommended in the Master Plan adopted in 1964."³ This letter is the earliest found in the Halprin Collection at the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, which documents communication between Springfield representatives and LHA. In the letter Reps promised efforts would be made to involve the firm in planning and design, should research into pedestrian mall trends across the country lead the City of Springfield to seek a landscape architect.

The next significant correspondence, dated Jan. 6, 1967, was addressed to LHA employee Felix Warburg, from Floyd Mattlage, Executive Director of Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority of the City of Springfield, Missouri. This letter notified Mr. Warburg that LHA was not selected as consultant for the Center City Urban Renewal Project. It appears, based upon records in the Halprin Collection, Urban Programming Corporation of St. Louis developed an urban renewal plan for downtown Springfield centered on the public square (Figure 1).

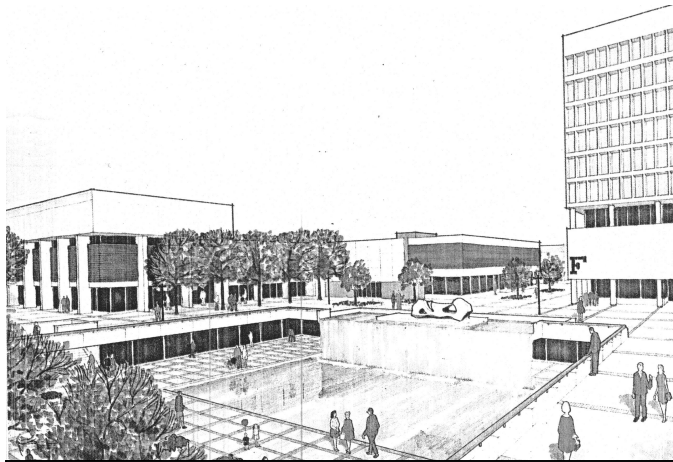


Figure 1 – Concept of the public square as envisioned in the Center City Urban Renewal Project prepared circa 1967 prior to LHA's involvement in the project. Note the sunken plaza, water feature and sculpture elements.

By December 1969, the City of Springfield had not yet accumulated enough non-cash credits to acquire Federal matching money for the whole Urban Renewal project. However, the Federal government had just recently made it possible to seek funds for Neighborhood Development Plans (NDPs) that were part of larger plans not completely funded.⁴

¹ All illustrations and much of the written information cited in this document is provided courtesy of The Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, and may not be reused without permission..

² "Downtowners Confident," pp. 35. Springfield (Mo.) Leader-Press, December 11, 1969.

³ Letter written by Louis William Reps to Lawrence Halprin Associates. August 20, 1965.

⁴ Taxpayers had voted against taxes to fund the Center City Urban Renewal Project.

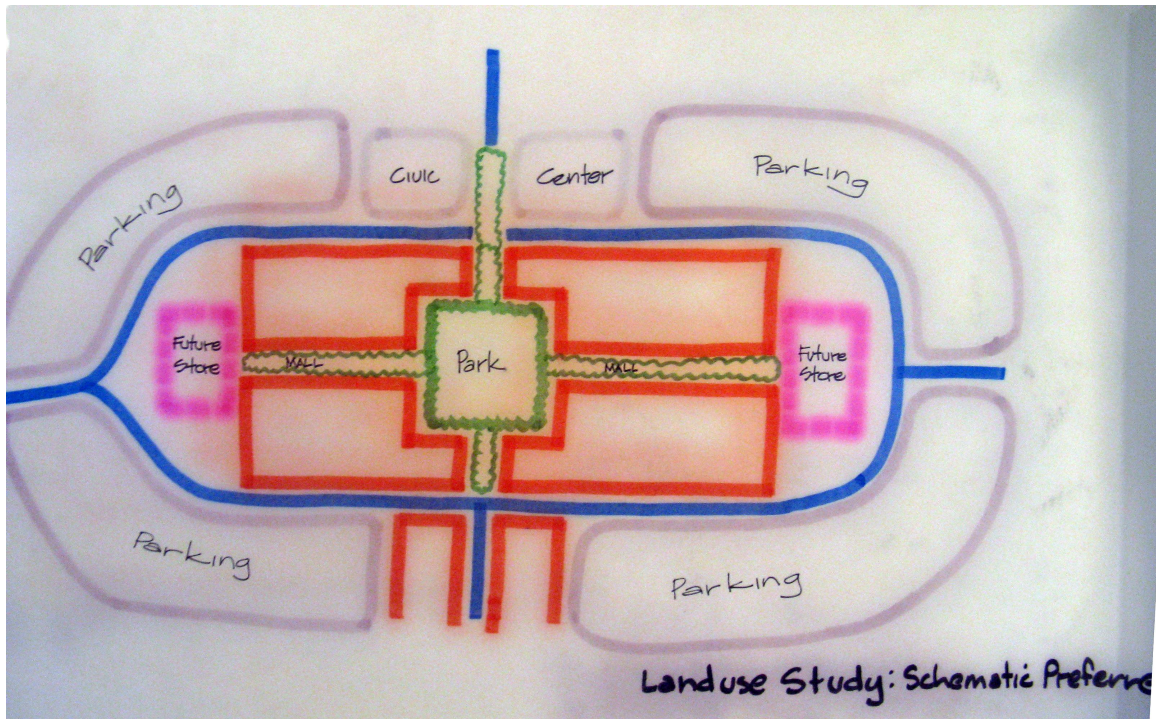


Figure 2 – Land Use Study of the larger Center City Renewal Plan. This “preferred” scheme and a couple of others are part of the Halprin Archives.

In the late summer of 1969, it appears that the Downtown Springfield Association (DSA) re-contacted LHA to provide design services for beautification of the Square and intersecting streets as part of a downtown pedestrian mall. The DSA raised private funds for the project and donated the funds to the City to pay for the public square construction as an NDP and used as non-cash credit toward future center city urban renewal. A second NDP, pursued in tandem with the Square redesign, reconfigured traffic through downtown to allow a completely pedestrian mall at the Square (**Figure 2**).

The intent behind the entire renewal project, as it related to the Square, was to ultimately eliminate vehicular traffic in the Square by rerouting traffic through streets that would circumvent the Square. The resulting loss of parking from the Square and intersecting streets would be compensated for by adding surface parking lots on the perimeter of these blocks. Several existing buildings were demolished to make room for the parking lots, which likely had the unintended effect of reducing building density in downtown that could have provided for more residents and businesses.

LHA’s design process, according to records in the Halprin Collection, began with a site inventory visit to Springfield by LHA employee George McLaughlin in September 1969. It is unclear how many others from LHA made this visit with Mr. McLaughlin, and there is no evidence in the Halprin Collection indicating that Lawrence Halprin himself ever came to Springfield. One month later, Mr. McLaughlin returned to present “first sketches”⁵ or diagrams to the DSA. Newspaper articles from the Archives do not

⁵ “Designer to Survey Downtown in 20 Days,” pp. 31, Springfield (Mo.) Leader-Press, August 28, 1969.

list Mr. Halprin as present. Mr. Louis Reps, consultant to the DSA, was present, continuing his involvement in the project which would extend into the preparation of working drawings. He provided historical information about Springfield to Mr. McLaughlin. A month after his site inventory visit, Mr. McLaughlin returned to present schematic design alternatives, examples of which are present in the Halprin Collection. Mr. Halprin is not mentioned in Archive materials as a participant or as being present at this presentation.

As many as 24 design concepts were prepared and possibly more that were not in the Halprin Collection (See Appendix). Although it isn't clear whether any specific parameters were given for the design, all appeared to feature a "sunken" central plaza with a focal point (presumably a fountain).⁶ The "sunken" plaza may have been derived from the Center City Urban Renewal Project plan prepared by Urban Programming Corporation. Its plan included this

feature prominently in the Square and depicted another level of retail shopping below street grade in a modernist plaza with an abstract sculpture and fountain. The Urban Programming Corporation concept also depicted the lower levels of shopping accessible from within the sunken square via covered arcades, an element also part of the plan eventually prepared by LHA

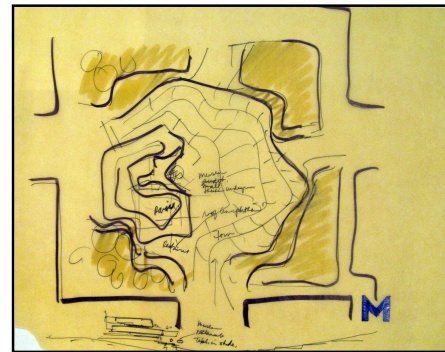


Figure 3-One of only two design concepts found in the Halprin Archives which resemble Lawrence Halprin's drawing style.

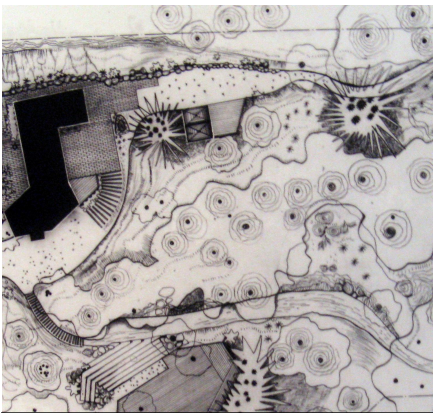


Figure 4- An example of Halprin's typical drawing style on exhibit at the Halprin Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Of the 24 concepts found in the Halprin Collection, only one or two appear to be drawn in the loose, organic sketch and design style of Lawrence Halprin (**Figures 3, 4**). Both appear to share the non-orthogonal expression of form indicative of Halprin's work and found in Lovejoy Fountain and Plaza, which today are considered signature Halprin designs. It appears that neither concept was pursued beyond sketch level. Of the remaining concepts in the Archives, they appear to have been prepared by several different people given the variations in graphic skill and style.

The design eventually selected for advancement into construction documents was presumably vetted through selection by the

⁶ The sunken nature of the plaza was often noted by attendees of a 2007 public workshop on the square as a negative attribute contributing to poor visibility into and out of the square, separating it from the surrounding buildings and sidewalks and contributing to the perception of the square as an unsafe environment.

Downtown Springfield Association and City of Springfield departments, but no records could be found in the Archives in regard to this. It does not appear that at any point the general public's input was solicited.⁷

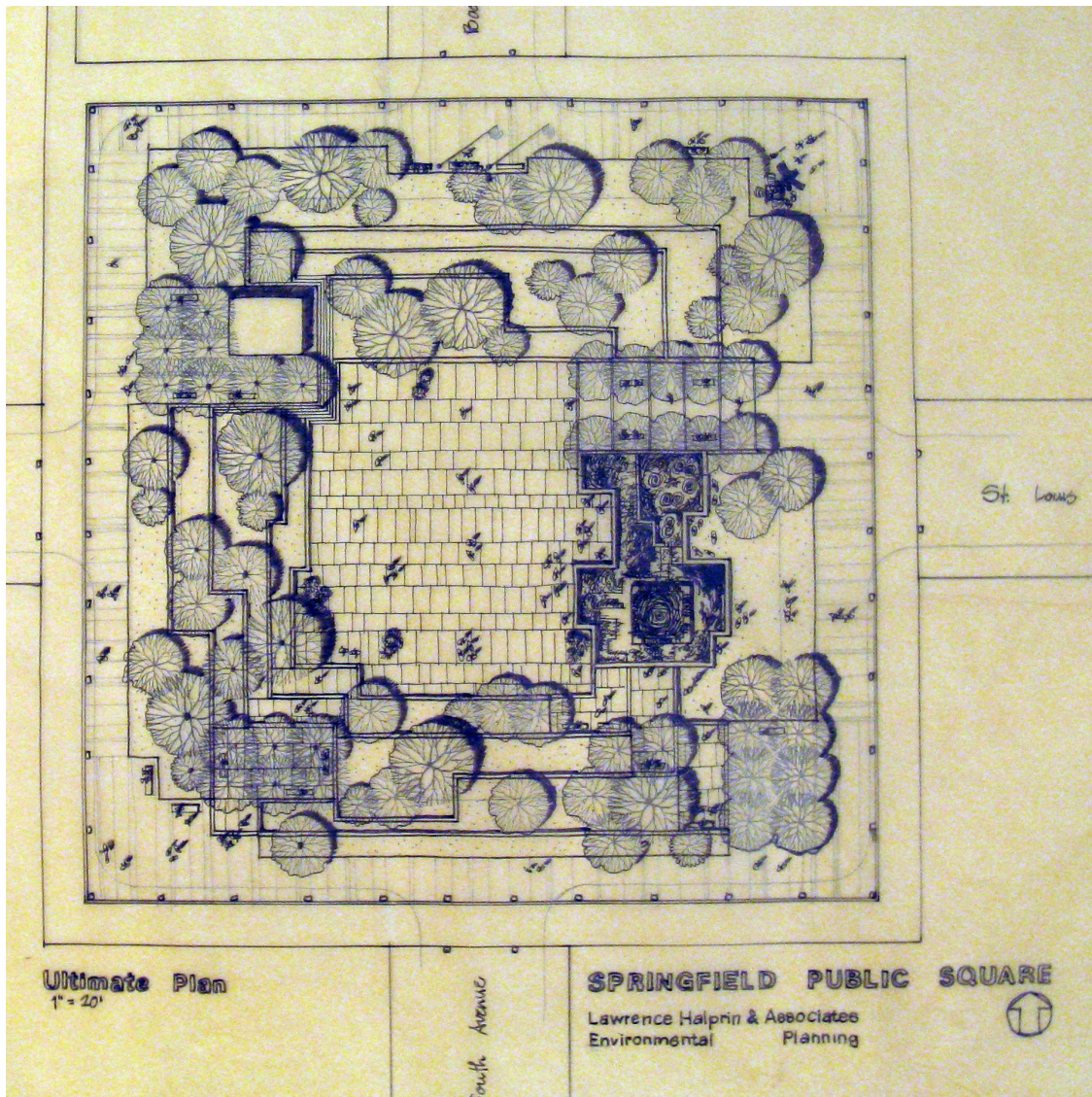


Figure 5 – LHA's "Ultimate Plan"

LHA's "Ultimate Plan" for the Square would have extended the design from building to building, not only eliminating vehicular traffic from the project boundaries, but removing the street entirely, allowing pedestrians to move freely throughout (**Figure 5**). This is also evidenced by construction documents in the Halprin Collection labeled as

⁷ In contrast, the design concept being developed in 2008 is the result of extensive input over several months from downtown focus groups, a public workshop open to and advertised to the general public, online surveys, on-site surveys at a downtown arts festival, an open house displaying alternative concepts, guidance from a technical steering committee and ultimately the near-unanimous approval of City Council.

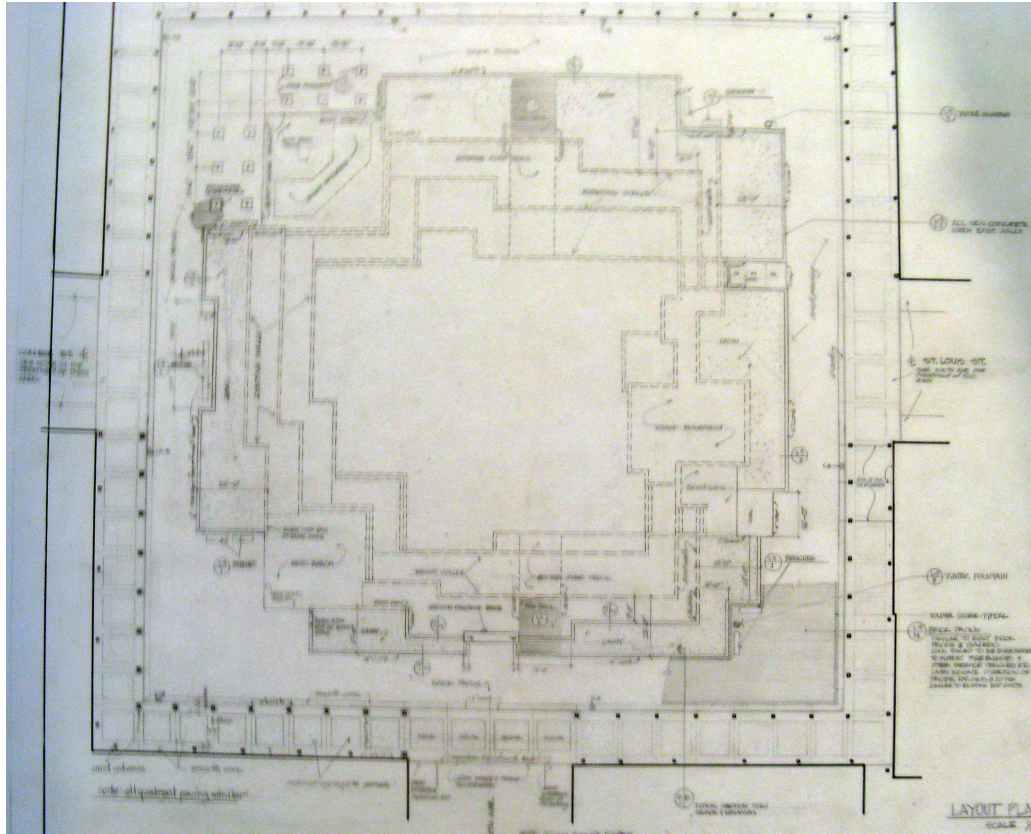


Figure 6-Site Plan prepared by L.H.A. dated October, 1971, ten months after the dedication of Phase 1. This construction document was prepared as Phase III (Phase II was construction of the first story arcades around the square) and represents the full extent of the ultimate concept.

Phase III (**Figure 6**). These documents illustrate the ultimate intent of the project which included the incorporation of a pedestrian-only mall along the intersecting streets for one block in every direction away from the Square, and extending a canopy across the points in the Square where the streets entered. As funds became available, the canopies were intended to be raised another story on top of what was built above the street level of the sidewalks and would be climate-controlled. It appears that what was actually built was a diminished fragment of this concept, a concept that would never be fully realized.

Since the completion of Phase I construction in December 1970, when LHA's Phase I drawings were constructed, many changes have been made to the park. The following timeline of documented changes are from documents provided by the City of Springfield Public Works Department.

1. **1974:** R.W. Booker & Associates (RWBA) of St. Louis prepared plans for the City of Springfield that appear to be an approximation of the work remaining to complete the design depicted in plans LHA produced for Phase III. This plan prohibited vehicular traffic in the square, and designs were introduced to create a pedestrian mall on the approach streets. It also implemented an approximation of retaining walls and trees extending further outward from the LHA design. These

added walls raised the elevation of the outer edge of the center square, making pedestrian access cumbersome around most of the square. The RWBA design did not implement brick paver pedestrian paving to connect the center design with the perimeter arcade, but rather maintained asphalt surfacing. A canopy was designed to span the approach streets, but these were placed a half block away from the Square on each street rather than connecting the square's perimeter arcades. It is unclear from copies of the LHA Phase III plans whether RWBA's plan used the same species of trees intended by LHA. It is unclear why RWBA was hired to design this phase rather than LHA being retained to continue its design work.

2. **1979:** The City of Springfield modified the street areas that were converted to pedestrian malls. The modifications involved adding pedestrian lights in a few locations and installing post and chain barriers at several locations in the mall.
3. **1984:** Sometime between 1974 and 1984, it appears that the asphalt surfaced loop in the square was paved over with exposed aggregate concrete, a different material than LHA proposed. In 1984, the City of Springfield prepared plans to reintroduce vehicular traffic to the square from Boonville and South Avenues. This included a curbed loop road around the perimeter of the square and adding stormwater improvements within the new street
4. **1998:** Vertical sheathing and lattice work on the gazebo were removed according to plans prepared by Ownby Associates. This plan also called for a new interactive water feature to be added in the center of the plaza along with 4 flanking trees; these were not implemented. The plan also proposed replacing most, if not all, of the trees that were at the time missing or determined in poor condition. There are trees in the square today that are not shown on LHA's Phase I plan or the Ownby plan either. Other elements in the Ownby plan that were implemented include a wheelchair ramp at the west side of the plaza, new paving pattern in the center of the plaza and new pavers in the service vehicle access, replacing the fire trail from LHA's plan.
5. Other than documented changes from different improvement plans, there have been several other changes that can simply be witnessed first-hand:
 - a. All of the trees from LHA's central plaza, and the original stone benches have been removed. The wooden benches now in the square were once in the pedestrian mall streets and were custom designed by RWBA.
 - b. 7 of the 9 trees from the bosque at the southwest corner have either died or been removed. In their place are empty square openings in the pavement.
 - c. The original pavers in the central plaza are generally in poor condition and are heaving in several locations.
 - d. Lighting in the square is inadequate and affects the desired feeling of security.
 - e. Most, if not all, of the power receptacles once used to serve lights in LHA's plaza trees are now missing or deteriorated.

- f. The focal point of LHA's design is the fountain.⁸ From the beginning, the "Halprin Fountain" has had mechanical problems and after 38 years has major problems with deteriorating pipes and pumps.
- g. The south fire trail has been removed entirely.
- h. The arcade canopies have been removed from 3 of the 4 quadrants of the Square in order to facilitate the renovation / restoration of the historic facades.

The firm of Lawrence Halprin & Associates prepared a design for Springfield's Public Square to convert it to Park Central Square. Only a portion of Halprin Associates' design was implemented, and the design has been obscured and compromised by modifications and neglect over the last 35 years. In addition, there is no evidence in the Halprin Collection of the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania that indicates that Lawrence Halprin had an ongoing, direct role in the project.

⁸ The design modifications proposed for Park Central Square will retain the main portion of the fountain, and will restore or rehabilitate the mechanical and plumbing systems.